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ABSTRACT

The author, Executive Director of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, examines the state of physical education in secondary school programs and presents twelve commonalities of quality physical education programs. Those common characteristics are identified as: (1) high student and staff morale; (2) frequent methods experimentation and continual evaluation; (3) effective use of time; (4) ability grouping for fitness and skill levels; (5) identification of development needs and formation of remedial activities; (6) clear statement of standards and frequent testing; (7) emphasis on self-competition; (8) identification, training, and utilization of outstanding students for use as activity leaders; (9) teacher participation in daily programs; (10) student understanding of the importance of regular activity, the principles of exercise, and their application; (11) community involvement through at least one "Physical Education Night" per year; and (12) dedication to excellence on the part of the department head. (MJB)

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PHYSICAL FITNESS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

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DAMAGING ARTICLE

On Sunday, October 30, 1977, the WASHINGTON STAR carried an article in the editorial section by John Fialka entitled, "Physical Education Only Trained us to Join the Spectator Society." The article was critical of the physical education the author had in Iowa, which was basically basketball -- learning the skills of the game then simply playing the game day in and day out. Fialka wrote, "The gym class was simply a large farm system for the school's basketball team, which in turn, was the main reason for the phys ed teacher's existence.

Sixty to 100 students were graduated from my school every year almost totally ignorant of the sports that you can carry with you into middle age -- like golf, tennis or bowling.

None of us had been given more than a few particles of knowledge about the physical care, feeding or repair of the human body, (Item: If you can't fix it with an aspirin or an Ace bandage, send it home with a note.) -

And certainly none of us had been convinced that a daily regimen of running, walking or swimming could be very beneficial, even joyful, when used as a release from an otherwise sedentary day.

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And so the school produced about five good basketball players each year. Some of them were very good and went on to play in college, but by their middle 20s even they had left the game, retaining only the memories and the occasional ability to predict weather changes from the pain in various joints.

And then they joined the rest of us, this great nation of spectators where, according to the President's Council on Physical Fitness, only 45 per cent of adults do any regular physical exercise.

This is a description of a system that some physical education specialists have tried to change. A few have succeeded. Others, many others, have found that change does not come easily because school boards and alumni groups often want the team more than they want physical education.

A proper physical education should teach one that an addiction to physical inactivity is at least as harmful as an addiction to smoking. Inactivity makes people twice as prone to heart disease and a more likely target for diabetes, ulcers and even mental illness.

But the importance of this truth is often taught later, much later, in the cramped, austere and often pain-filled quiet of doctors' examining rooms. The nation, you see, has been brought up to ignore the simple physical truths as long as possible.

(Most health insurance programs prolong this ignorance by not providing coverage for physical examinations.)"

Pretty harsh criticism. Deserved? I don't think so, but it's an important writer's point of view and was surely read by many congressmen, White House personnel and possibly the President himself.

I've heard of "throw out the ball" programs which always include football, basketball and softball during the season of play, but this is the first time I've heard of a "throw out the round ball only" curriculum year after year.

CHANGING VALUES

To a number of physical educators, "the new physical education" gives low rank to physical fitness. UPDATE, October 1976, AAHPER in the article, Physical Educator Values Change, reported on the ranking graduate students at a New Jersey College gave to the objectives of physical education.

Self realization was No. 1; mental development 2; emotional stability 3; leisure time activities 4; social competency and neuromuscular skills 5&6; organic vigor (physical fitness) 7; democratic values 8, cultural appreciation 9; and spiritual and moral strength 10. A prior study using the same objectives given to Texas college physical education professors in 1967-68 ranked organic vigor No. 1 .

This may give us a clue to why there has been little or no gains in youth fitness test results since 1965.

REIFF REPORTS

Last November, at a national conference hosted by AAHPER and the USOE in Washington, Dr. Guy Reiff, University of Michigan, reported on "The Fitness of American Youth and Implications for Physical Education in the USA." Dr. Reiff was one of the chief investigators of the study which analyzed the 1975 AAHPER Youth Fitness Test results and since has been involved in a national "Status of Physical Education Survey." Highlights of Dr. Reiff's report were:

1. There were little or no gains in test results between 1965 and 1975, even though the present performance levels for even the 50th to the 70th percentiles for all tests leave room for a great deal of improvement to say nothing of the scores representing the lower percentiles.
2. Some extrapolations from the 1975 fitness study were:

	<u>Population Estimates</u>
a. One out of six boys cannot do <u>one</u> pull-up.	2,319,712
b. One out of 36 boys did zero pull-ups and less than 15 sit-ups.	364,898
c. One out of 67 boys did zero pull-ups, less than 15 sit-ups, and ran longer than three minutes in the 600-yard run.	189,711
d. One out of ten girls cannot hold her chin over the bar for <u>one</u> second.	1,239,447

Population
Estimates

- | | |
|---|---------|
| e. One out of 30 girls did zero on the flexed-arm hang and less than fifteen sit-ups. | 417,365 |
| f. One out of 62 girls did zero seconds on the flexed arm hang, less than 15 sit-ups and ran longer than <u>four</u> minutes in the 600-yard run. | 215,006 |
3. It was quite clear that low fitness test performance was attributed to excess weight.
4. Although secondary programs in the large cities (greater than 200,000 students) reported a dramatic decrease in time, more than half of ^{*the districts reported that*} ~~those~~ programs stayed about the same, and for some grade levels a trend to increase time was identified. Thus the failure to improve youth fitness test scores is not because of time cutbacks for physical education instruction.

Dr. Reiff ended his presentation with the following summary:

"What we do not seem to be doing is sensitizing or challenging the youngster to the values of maintaining at least "average" levels of physical performance and fitness throughout the school years and beyond. Surely if some time were allotted to the development and improvement of abdominal strength, upper arm strength and running endurance, and some serial measurements introduced, more school children would partake in fitness activities, and test results would improve. The results of these simple tests do not indicate that this is happening."

HOW MUCH VIGOROUS ACTIVITY IN THE TYPICAL PROGRAM

Have you ever clocked the amount of vigorous activity in a physical period? An associate did at a number of high schools and found that time ran from 0 to 8 minutes in a typical 50-minute class. Try it sometime!

In many schools fun has replaced the "satisfaction of achievement" as the key word to describe physical education. To keep pupils happy at any costs, some teachers have scrapped anything they felt was too hard or might involve some risk -- any activity which spelled sweat, discomfort or effort. Tests are too frequently "badmouthed," for failure is never allowed.

ISN'T IT A SHAME

At this point let's ask ourselves isn't it a shame when an individual leaves high school without:

- * Ever having been in good physical conditioning.
- * Understanding the contributions of exercise to heart health, prevention of lower back problems, weight control and to dynamic healthful well-being. (Bows to lose weight, plays golf for cardiopulmonary fitness, etc.)
- * Knowing the principals of exercise and how to apply them.
- * Being able to swim and to help others in water safety in emergencies.
- * Having competency in a lifetime sport for every season.
- * Having jogged some distance and without understanding interval training.

Isn't it a shame, when physical educators have the greatest potential to influence the lives of their students and they just don't get through.

COMMONALITIES IN QUALITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

To turn from the negative to the positive I've attempted to analyze the commonalities in quality physical education programs:

1. The morale of both staff and students is high. Both groups are proud of the program.
2. Staff constantly tries new methodology. Staff and students know what has worked effectively and what has not. The program is continually evaluated.
3. Like the good athletic coaching period, time is sacred and the class is organized to utilize physical education time effectively.
4. Classes are ability grouped for physical fitness and sports skills.
5. Physically underdeveloped students are identified and provided remedial activities under the best teachers.
6. Approximately 20% of the physical education time is spent in testing. Challenge of prior performance is permitted on fitness tests. Standards are understood by students and are adjusted as norms improve.
7. Fitness achievement emphasizes competition against self.
8. Outstanding students are trained, identified, and utilized as student leaders for physical education classes.
9. Teachers are good examples of program objectives.
(It's not usual to see a teacher participate in all activities in at least one physical education class each day.)

10. Students understand the importance of regular physical activity to health; the principles of exercise and how to apply them.
11. A formalized interpretation program for the community is implemented including at least one "Physical Education Night" each year.
12. Lastly, there is never a quality program without a dedicated physical education head who just isn't satisfied with second-best.

SUMMARY

Leadership in so many professions and vocations in our country has dropped off in recent years, but there are a number of signs which cause me to feel we're headed back to the need for the satisfaction of a job well done and basics in education.

You've heard the expression, "we have met the enemy and he is us." Our problems seem to be more of our own making. Physical education is beset by factionalism and communications failures. Some physical educators appear willing to jeopardize the whole program for the sake of their own narrow specialties, and some speak a professional jargon scarcely intelligible to the layman. Neither of these practices impresses the public or school administrators; they irritate and confuse them.

I'm upset and puzzled because physical education has several strong selling points which it could be stressing. Regular

vigorous physical activity is a basic form of preventive medicine; skills in the lifetime sports are useful social skills, as well as tools for health maintenance; and there is mounting evidence that physical fitness contributes to improved performance in every area of human endeavor.

It's time physical education returned to these basics. The sooner it does, the sooner it will be returned to its rightful place in the school curriculum.

Physical educators must do a better job of interpreting and selling themselves to the public. Their survival depends on it.

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